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WILDERNESS SONGS

GRACE HAZARD CONKLING

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WILDERNESS SONGS

WILDERNESS SONGS

BY

GRACE HAZARD CONKLING

Author of "Afternoons of April"

For there they that led us captive
required of us songs.
Psalm 137

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TO MY DAUGHTERS

ELSA and HILDA

THESE SONGS OF THE WILDERNESS

¿ Quién hubiese tal ventura ?

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SONGS OF NEW ENGLAND ROADS

THE ROAD TO MOUNT TOM

The blue hills loom through morning mist:
The wet road gleams like amethyst.

What color is the road today?
Thin amethyst with a silver soul,
Or lavender in a veil of gray,
Or crystal in a cloud's control?
From golden-rod to meadow-sweet
It takes the brief hill, running fleet
Between the morning-glory vines
And past the primrose hedge that shines
With clusters pale of gilded dew.
Where flowers of chicory bold and blue
Repeat the sky along the ground,
And black-eyed Susans golden-gowned
Lean shrewdly for the gossips' view,
It shrugs and nods with kindly smile,
And with the morning on its face
Slips down another silvery mile
Through bramble blossoms and queen's-lace.
It leaps to follow the clear river
And laughs to see the ripples shiver,
But there is depth in its gray eyes
Within the shade where birches quiver.

Now with wild roses in its hair
It springs along the mountain stair
And climbs in sensitive surprise
Closer and closer to the skies.
The cool green tunnels of the wood,
The graybeard rocks in solitude
Wonder to see the road go by
Like a swift spirit wild and shy;
For it has traveled fast and far
With the steep azure for a goal:
And yonder where great spaces are
Even a road may claim a soul
Wherein remembered flowers gleam,
Lest all its journey fade to dream.

THE ROAD TO HOCKANUM FERRY

I found a river lane
All lovely and forlorn
That plunged and climbed again
Through softly clashing corn,
Where curved and melting shapes
Of hills like purple grapes
Were veiled in powdery bloom;
And rich in showered gloom
Dark Holyoke met the cloud that promised rain.

A traveler like me,
The river trod serene,
Aware of melody
In neighbor meadows green,
And how that July day
Ripening harvests lay
Superb beneath the sun,
In velvet every one,
Colored like shallows of a southern sea.

I had no time to rest
The valley was so sweet.
The wind ran from the west
On cool adventurous feet
And put the storm to flight.
Goldfinches for delight
Quavered their tender words,
And golden as the birds
A great cloud burned upon the sunset's crest.

And there I saw you stand,
I well remember how,
Heart of the radiant land
So dim and lonely now.
The fields in green and blue
Had known the way to you.
You were the river's word,
And wind and cloud and bird
Conspired to lay my hand within your hand.

THE ROAD TO THE POOL

I know a road that leads from town,
A pale road in a Watteau gown
Of wild-rose sprays, that runs away
All fragrant-sandaled, slim and gray.

It slips along the laurel grove
And down the hill, intent to rove,
And crooks an arm of shadow cool
Around a willow-silvered pool.

I never travel very far
Beyond the pool where willows are:
There is a shy and native grace
That hovers all about the place,

And resting there I hardly know
Just where it was I meant to go,
Contented like the road that dozes
In panniered gown of briar roses.

THE SAW-MILL ON THE CONNECTICUT

Where clear the river ponders
  The marshes' slow maroon,
There floats a leveled forest
  Upon a broad lagoon.

The bowl of spacious meadow
  Is brimmed with trunks of trees
And there's a wilding fragrance
  Embroidered on the breeze.

Along the azure water
  Most patiently they lie,
And hear the shrieking saw-mill
  And memorize the sky,

And see the impartial sunlight
  They knew so well of old,
Turn shavings into satin
  And saw-dust into gold.

All in the ripe September
  I tried to pass today.
The smooth road beckoned *Follow!*
  But the logs whispered . . . *Stay!*

And lest alone the tree-folk
Go sadly to their death,
I watched the pine surrender
Its rich and final breath,

And heard the oak's last murmur
Where poured its scented dust—
"I do but travel onward
As valiant farers must."

SONGS ON THE MOHAWK TRAIL

To a Soldier in France

Oh, if today you dream of home,
Think of a road we know,
Untangling a blue skein of hills:
And how the birches grow
Against the light: and of that day
Only a year ago!

For here along those hills again
Your little son and I
Are wishing the enchanted Trail
Would lead us round the sky
And drop us in a Flanders field
To see you marching by.

And now the child is eager for
A wonder-tale of Greece,
I tell him how you sailed away
Like Jason for the Fleece,
To find a glory more than gold
Beside the winding Lys.

But while his deep eyes glow and glow,
It seems another tells
The tale: and beauty to my heart
No word of meaning spells;
And the river on the valley floor
Flows over Flemish bells.

The Little Prince

This pine cone is my offering,
And here are berries blue,
And if you'll take a birchen wand,
I'll make it fine for you,

With Pan's pipes cut in satin bark,
And Hermes' wingèd shoe,
And Orpheus' lyre shaped like a heart.
Will such a scepter do?

White Birches

The clear wind swings a fairy flail
Till all the tiptoe birches quail.
The west is dreaming of the Grail.

God knows I have no heart to sing!
I wish I had forgotten how,
For what do poems matter now,
Music or love or anything?

Yet I must shape my patient rhymes
For terror of a grievous place,
And blind my eyes with words sometimes,
For fear of hunger on his face,
Or pain when I can give no aid,
Or silence where I may not come:
As though a song could save me from
The thought of all my world unmade!

The birches hold their laces frail
Against the sunlight up the Trail
And show me heaven through a veil.

The Whole Duty of Berkshire Brooks

To build the trout a crystal stair;
To comb the hillside's thick green hair;
To water jewel-weed and rushes;
To teach first notes to baby thrushes;
To flavor raspberry and apple
And make a whirling pool to dapple
With scattered gold of late October;
To urge wise laughter on the sober
And lend a dream to those who laugh;
To chant the beetle's epitaph;
To mirror the blue dragonfly,
Frail air-plane of a slender sky;

Over the stones to lull and leap
Herding the bubbles like white sheep;
The claims of worry to deny,
And whisper sorrow into sleep!

After Sunset

I have an understanding with the hills
At evening when the slanted radiance fills
Their hollows, and the great winds let them be,
And they are quiet and look down at me.
Oh, then I see the patience in their eyes
Out of the centuries that made them wise.
They lend me hoarded memory and I learn
Their thoughts of granite and their whims of fern,
And why a dream of forests must endure
Though every tree be slain: and how the pure
Invisible beauty has a word so brief,
A flower can say it or a shaken leaf,
But few may ever snare it in a song,
Though for the quest a life is not too long.
When the blue hills grow tender, when they pull
The twilight close with gesture beautiful,
And shadows are their garments, and the air
Deepens, and the wild veery is at prayer,
Their arms are strong around me: and I know
That somehow I shall follow when you go

To the still land beyond the evening star,
Where everlasting hills and valleys are,
And silence may not hurt us any more,
And terror shall be past, and grief, and war.

To a Tired Child

This tall gray road that climbs the sky
    Is neighbor to a star,
But if you watch the trees go by,
    It will not seem so far:

And if you listen very still
    As though you were quite grown,
Maybe the thrushes on the hill
    Will think themselves alone,

And talk a bit in their own way
    Or gossip with the star.
Hush! for a star is shy they say,
    As any thrushes are.

JOURNEY'S END

The long west like an evening sea
Held the blue day mysteriously,
And crest to crest the hilltops rolled
Like breakers on a coast of gold.

The bee sped home. The west wind sprang
Along the valley-floor and sang
Of fragrances he had to lend
The apple-trees at Journey's End.

Alone the silent house looked out
To see the loveliness about,
A happy house, aware of May,
And gray as apple-leaves are gray.

It heard the veery's vesper hymn,
And watched the golden west go dim,
Till even Greylock far and proud
Had lost his plume of primrose cloud.

Follow the road if you would see
How dear a thing a house can be,
And find it dreaming, faintly gray
As budding apple-leaves in May.

The ample hearth, the quiet room,
The bough of coral apple-bloom,
The singing bird, the waiting friend
Are all for you at Journey's End.

SONGS OF WAR

WAR

Moon, moon, what have you seen
The other side of the sky?
A blasted land that once was green,
Where fields and forests die.
Naked hills and plains that shiver
Desperate with their mud.
A broken valley and a river
Running deep with blood.
Moon, moon, what of the men
Where rivers thus run red?
I saw them fall and fall again:
I could not count the dead.
I saw their souls like hosts of stars
Climb the sky's dark blue hill.
Oh, all in vain the other wars
Since men are fighting still!
Moon, moon, why is your look
So pitiful and white?
It is because of one who took
The lonely road tonight:
Who fought like valor's favorite child,
Who burned the foe like flame,
And went with Death unreconciled
Crying his country's name.

THE RETURN OF JEANNE D'ARC

JEANNE D'ARC:

Why do the vales of Paradise
Turn very France before my eyes
With linkèd rivers, chain on chain,
Cool Meuse and amber-sandaled Aisne,
Angelic Oise serenely fleet,
And wayward Rhône on winged feet?
There gleams the Loire through lace of trees,
Shod as of old with silences.
And there with Paris at its breast
The white Seine lies along the west
How wistful!
Nay, my serious Seine,
Will nothing make thee smile again?
Has any gargoyle peering down
From Notre Dame with hostile frown,
Invaded thy still dreams at night?
Dost thou lament the lost delight
Of years long gone?
I wonder why
Proud Paris veils her from the sky
In twilight vesture like a nun?
I wonder, what has heaven done?

The lights are dead, the land is gray,
Like ghosts the pale roads drift away
Into the north! Oh, I would see
What years have wrought in Domremy,
And how great Rheims above the town
Lifts praying hands! I must go down
Among my people, I must know
What makes my heart remember so,
And why the voices cry so near,
The human voices that I hear!

THE MEN OF FRANCE:

Now Mary lend thee out of heaven
For dear defense of rivers seven
And shattered gateways of the north!
Angel of France, oh, lead us forth!

JEANNE D'ARC:

They are invaded! They have need
Of my heart's faith! Yea, I will lead,
But can they follow when I go
Unseen and vague as winds that blow?
Yet shepherd winds control the day,
To make the poplars lean one way,
To ruffle rivers into gold,
Herd home the clouds into far fold,

And tirelessly evoke the shy
Wild iris hidden in the sky.
Can my wing'd spirit so persuade
Their hearts to follow unafraid?

THE MEN OF FRANCE:

Now Michael gird thee with his sword
To thrust aside the alien horde,
To bend and break and hurl them forth!
Come, thou, and lead us to the north!

JEANNE D'ARC:

Soldiers, my great gray horse long gone
To graze the meadows of the dawn
Has thriven on clear asphodel,
Till you shall learn, he travels well,
And victory is still his stride.
You see me not, but oh, I ride
For France, and mark her starry goal,
The faith and freedom of the soul.
Do you but follow and give ear
To heavenly voices that I hear,
Till past the black besieging din
And whistling menace shrill and thin,
Emerge some silvery interval
Of vanished bells that call and call.

Forsaken save of sun and stars,
With portals blurred by battle scars,
With towers torn and windows gone,
'Tis mighty Rheims that cries you on!
Though heaven and earth be withering,
Her ruined bells shall sob and sing:
Though earth and heaven be blank and bare,
You shall behold her standing there
With wounded arms uplifted high
For men of France who fight and die!

THE MEN OF FRANCE:

Now heaven help thee understand
The peril come upon our land!
Now God forgive our little worth
And grant thee memory of earth!

JEANNE D'ARC:

I do remember everything
I had forgotten: how the king
For all my pleading still delayed,
But God's own angels gave me aid.
There was a Chinon nightingale
That sang all night: "You will not fail!"
And there were always saintly trees,
And dim old flowery villages,

And rain-pricked pools like fretted shields,
And sunny hills and mellow fields,
Oh, there was France! So now she lies
Appealing-sweet before my eyes,
Her wide flush rivers for delight,
Her spires and poplars to invite
The eyes and thoughts toward heaven.

Men,

I fight beside you once again,
As those brief centuries ago:
Each man of you a man I know!
In Paradise I have not seen
Faces more steadfast and serene.
Let them not tear the temple down
That holds the soul of Rouen town,
Nor crush the lilies Amiens wears,
Nor those fair vines along the stairs
Of Chartres, where some hand unknown
Lured leaf and fruit from silver stone.
This sunward hour of deepening dawn
Brings glory of your comrades gone,
And Rheims' lost bells are ringing!"

THE MEN OF FRANCE:

Hark!
It is her voice! Jeanne d'Arc! Jeanne d'Arc!

REFUGEES

Belgium—1914

"Mother, the poplars cross the moon;
The road runs on so white and far,
We shall not reach the city soon,
Oh, tell me where we are!"

"Have patience, patience, little son,
And we shall find the way again.
(God show me the untraveled one!
God give me rest from men!)"

"Mother, you did not tell me why
You hurried so to come away.
I saw big soldiers riding by.
I should have liked to stay."

"Hush, little man, and I will sing
Just like a soldier, if I can;
They have a song for everything.
Listen, my little man!

"This is the soldiers' marching song.
We'll play this is the village street——"
"Yes, but this road is very long
And stones have hurt my feet."

"No, little pilgrim, on with you,
And yonder field shall be the town.
I'll show you how the soldiers do
Who travel up and down.

"They march and sing and march again,
Not minding all the stones and dust;
They go (God grant me rest from men!)
Forward because they must."

"Mother, I want to go to sleep."
"No, darling! Here is bread to eat!
(Oh, God if thou couldst let me weep
Or heal my broken feet!)"

AT THE CROSS-ROADS

He was a little Belgian lad
Whom war had somehow failed to mar.
Almost a baby face he had,
Bewildered now and vaguely sad.
" Where are you going in the wind
And rain? And must you travel far? "
He said, " I've started out to find
The country where the mothers are."

LETTER TO AN AVIATOR IN FRANCE

Lake Champlain—June, 1918

A slope of summer sprinkled over
With sweet tow-headed pigmy clover
Melts suddenly to emerald air
Between the moving leaves: for where
The terrace plunges noiselessly
A woven wall of apple-tree
(Bearing instead of apples now
The redwinged blackbird on the bough,)
Enchants the lawn of sunstained green
To seem as though it had not been.
From where I sit, no roots are there
Nor gnarly trunks show anywhere:
Only the thick-leaved upper boughs
Close-clustered for the robin's house.
And tall above them up the sky
The clear lake quivers like some high
Wind-ruffled huge crystalline tree
Whose roots like theirs are hid from me.
It must have light and air and room,
With clouds for leaves and hills for bloom,
Those pale blue hills that flower along
The living branches wild and strong—

I hear you laugh and say,
" *Why make*
A tree of crystal from the lake?
Of course you may if you prefer
Shape forests out of lake-water,
Great stems of sapphire, shedding light!
I understand you. It's all right.
But since you are in fantastic mood,
Build me a shelter in that wood
To keep June sounds and colors in,
And shut out the infernal din
Of war my ears have heard and heard
Until no meaning lights the word! "

Well, when it's done and you come home,
Lift up the latch of gilded foam
And enter the transparent door
And cross the grooved and shining floor
Of a new house I'm building, sir,
Of foam and wind on lake-water,
With walls intangible about
The inner rooms, to keep war out!

But this is nonsense. I have lost
My whim. Your laugh recalled has cost
So many Spanish castles, dear!
And I confess there's no tree here

Heaven-tall, with hills upon its boughs,
No sheltering sunlight-raftered house,
But only water wide and bare,
And distant shore and empty air,
And far away across the world
A proud enduring flag unfurled.

Yet you and I could never live
But for the respite that dreams give.
Your letters have their intervals,
Their hints of magic: a bird calls
Or a strange cloud goes by. You hear
Music unknown to mortal ear,
And as you said in other days,
"Last night I dreamed," your message says.
So in the end I scorn your laughter,
Lord of my secret thoughts! And after
War will come peace, you'll not deny,
And wider light for dreaming by.
Now, let's pretend as children do;
It is my way of reaching you.
Blue Vermont hills, we'll say, are fruit
Which I may pluck when it shall suit
My mood and send like grapes to you,
All honey-rich and webbed with dew,
Packed in their cloudy leaves and cool
Of color like a twilight pool.

And if you've wandered past the sky
On some new errand, comrade, I
Shall climb the tree the fruit grew on,
To see which road it is you've gone.
How shall I plan to overtake
Those wings of yours? And I must make,
In time to welcome you, a proud
White castle of some mountain cloud . . .
But no more now . . . The old clock clangs
Somewhere within. A veery hangs
Small golden wreaths along the alder,
And mother Robin's babies called her
Just now from their leaf-hidden room,
And sunset roses are in bloom.

THE NAMES

Now he is dead who loved the traveling cloud
And knew the white road to the harbor ships:
And romance has gone by that called aloud
His name, and summoned laughter from his lips.
I read the words, I know that this is true,
But will you other women feel as I
When the tall door of Paradise swings to,
And glory has forsaken the wide sky?
For though I read, my heart cannot believe.
The wind cries *No!* along the glittering track
Above the dusk, and will not let me grieve.
(It was a wind that brought Odysseus back.)
And oh, the copses where the thrushes dwell,
The foxglove forests with their outlaw bees,
The moon-rise like a distance-softened bell,
The hills that claimed him! I must think on these,
(And how I always knew that he had heard
The music dripping from the rainbow's edge,
And the brief meteor's infrequent word,
And God's low footfall in the river-sedge,)
Till all wild earth lays passionate hands on him,
The very islands will not let him go,
Nor the old mountains, nor the seas that rim
The unknown clinging lands!

Thus do I know
How strange the message that will come to you,
All of you others who must read the names:
And while your hearts deny that truth be true,
The letters of one word like separate flames
Will light the face of a forgotten flower,
Or broken water with the sunset stained,
Or a lost midnight, and the secret hour
Of wonder when nor thought nor speech remained:
And one of you will say *It was not vain!*
And one recall the valiant things he said,
But all the time, reiterate as rain,
Some jest of his turned sharp, now he is dead,
Will leave your every feeling wholly numb,
Forbidding tears, the tears that may not come.

Almost they come to me: so long you will
Stare at the names, incredulous and still.

ADVENTURE

"Oh, we shall travel yet,"
You told me, "late or soon!
Hearken and overhear
Syllables of the moon
Meant for the tides to fear,
Borrow her silver threat,
Make their wild hearts obey:
Climb in our feathered shoon
Tall waves that dare not wet
Our feet with a curl of foam:
Stroll through the coral home,
While ocean leans one way—
All this and more, some day!"
You said. Could I forget?

We talked like children then.
You asked, "What will you wear
The other side of the sky?
A planet in your hair?
A gown of clear-spun air
Colored like evening when
The sunset has blown by?

Garments of ether made
With broideries of cloud
Would suit you: but for me
There will be ways maybe
To dress more soberly:
A shadowed purple proud
Or grave enameled blue,
Oh, never be afraid
I shall not look as well as you!"
You cried, and laughed aloud.

I knew that you would fly,
Only not how soon!
Your spirit craved adventure in the moon.
Daybreak tempted you,
And I would hear you sigh,
Baffled by morning's blue.
I have heard you say,
"They seem not far away,
The spaces I would know.
The infinite is not tall
When longing is on me
To climb the sky's sheer wall
High enough to see!
Unhindered I would go
Across the bridge of light
Into the silence white.

Voices of past lives call
Along my blood, and all
My being must respond
When winds rise up and fall
Down the clear deeps beyond.
I want to go with the wind
The other side of the sky:
Who knows what I might find?"
And then you smiled and I
Heard in my heart *Goodbye.*

Now when the day is right,
And it is flying weather,
I think of the last talk we had together
Through a midsummer night.
"Well, then," you said, "since we must fight
Best choose the field of air.
Plunge past the cloud, pursue
The foe down alleys blue
Round sunlight corners, ride
Straight up the sapphire stair
And let the wind decide!
. . . The wind's a friend of mine,
And with a ship to steer
That matters much! If there is work to do!
Don't trust them if you hear . . .

I mean . . . if they should say I'm dead,
Be sure I'm waiting!" finally you said.

Small news could come to us.
I know they found you there
In a torn Flanders field
Under the crashing clouds,
And wrapped you in the flag,
Strangest of all shrouds,
That turned your mud-stained khaki glorious.
There was a soldiers' prayer,
And the guns called again,
Called to living men . . .
And battle-smoke concealed
The morning's crystal crag
Towering aglow,
Wherefrom you turned to go,
Free for adventure unrevealed
You longed to know.

Nothing is tragic here
Unless the dreaming stops.
Sometimes when twilight drops
I am too lonely and your words
Go crying like lost birds,
And I unlearn my year.
But nomad wings so dear

To you, and broken speech
Of wild things each to each,
The veering duck that lie
Sidelong the wind and cry
In passing, the brief swan
Leaning on sails of snow,
These bring you very near;
With them you soar and go.
You drive the slant geese down across the dawn:
Shouting you rush by
Along the sky!
And one day I shall follow south,
Hear from your own mouth
What highways you have gone,
What wonders you have seen.
When Spring again is green,
And it is lilac-time in all the lanes,
Say to me—I shall know—
What you said long ago.
Let me not once forget.
Call through the emerald netted rains,
Say, *We shall travel yet*
Past all imaginings.
There will be much to do
Among the stars with you
When we have wings.

SIX SONGS FROM OVER THERE

The Star

Dusk made a thrust at my heart
With a star like a sword.
I had forgotten the war
Though the guns roared
And shells droned on and on
In a sullen chord.

It was not the noise and the reek
But a star in the sky
Made the black trench real again.
Starlight, and I
Saw beauty vanished away
And love gone by.

Meuse

The river marched an extra mile
To loop the field and spare the grass,
And that was where wild tulips lived
And where the blackbird liked to pass.

It seemed a sorry thing that we
  Unmindful of the river's grace
Should plow the tulip-field with shells
  And leave a desert in its place.

His Fallen Comrade

I wish that I could tell him Spring
Drifts north along the valley track
Across new violets, and how
The myrtle warblers have come back
That love his ragged cedar-trees,
And how the pear invites the bees.

He said that news like this from home
Would call him back though he were dead,
Nor any distant Paradise
Could hold him. That is what he said,
And now the letter's here, and he
Returns to read, how stealthily!

Irish

As I was plodding through the mud,
    Through the mud and through,
Somewhere I heard a fiddle cry
    A tune the way they do;

And it was sweet, the way they have,
Through my heart and through,
Making a picture on the dark
Of you!

Lull

After the uproar
Such silence is strange.
Not a nerve in my body
But aches from the change.
Wild thoughts go clanging
Loud as the guns:
I have forgotten
The small quiet ones.

Now by such darkness
Made free of dreams,
Where looms my mountain?
Where flow my streams?
Where is the country
Of my delight?
I have forgotten
Dreaming, tonight.

Apology

There is an air of Bach that means
  A late New England Spring to me:
Soundless collisions among clouds,
  White apple-honey for the bee,
The cricket limbering his trill,
  The grass wherefrom he likes to sing,
The rainbow leaning to the lawn,
  The spider's wheel, the redstart's wing.

Here in a trench of Flanders mud
  It is the only thing I know
That means a catbird whistling down
  A lane I followed long ago.
Again I find the open door
  Beyond the twisted lilac-tree,
And through that latticed German tune
  You look at me.

THE DREAM

A hillside acre or two astride a brook,
Tipped toward blue valley, fenced with apple-trees,
A strip of flowery pasture whence the bees
Could gather flavors for your winter book,
Red cedar for the hearth, a lane to crook
An elbow round the cottage, silences
To tempt the thrushes, simple things like these
Were in our dream; for these we used to look.
And now I have found a place of delicate heath
And downward-leaping stream and leaning hill
Above a valley blue as grapes are blue,
It must be fought for as you fight beneath
The flag of stars. Our dream must wait until
France has her cities back, and I have you.

THE RUINED CITIES

They are not gone, those fair French towns,
They shall evade oblivion's spell,
Put on their towers again like crowns
And stand triumphant where they fell.
Though now no street, not one, remain,
Where once a hundred streets were wide,
The feet of men will find again
Those ancient ways of love and pride:
The hands of men like a caress
Shall touch them, stone on tragic stone,
Remembering their ancientness,
Eager to give them back their own!
They are not dead, they only sleep,
Exiled to dreams without a bell
To call them home: but men will keep
Their silvery shapes in mind to tell
The builders how to fashion them
In gray of dove and gray dove's wing,
And where they curved to their bright hem
Of field or river! Everything
They were, their slender uprightness,
Their candid strength and pure design
Survives. They shall not do with less
Than their full dower of lovely line,

Naked the stone or wrought like lace.
And even now some artist knows
By heart the lost cathedral's grace,
Restores in thought its ruined rose,
And lifts his dream above the plain.
They shall come back, forget their trance
Of death-like slumber, live again,
Cities of a victorious France!

HIS LETTER

Beyond the steel and the fire
Gleams the old desire.

War has not taken wonder away.
More poignant where its lightnings play
The appeal of beauty's lonely cry!
I shall go dreaming till I die.
I see wind-burnished coin-bright towns,
And roads that shine across the downs;
A dusk of forest and a line
Of light that silvers the design;
Always the shadowed and the bright,
A halo for the blackest night!
—Islands where I have never been;
The rainbow toppling down the green
Of tilted seas that rake a ship:
The molten lava-streams that slip
From fiery crater-rims and fill
The dark with rose and daffodil;
Lakes mountain-hid and spiritual;
The undiscovered waterfall
Like a white feather through the trees,
The undiscovered bird in these

Singing, always alone, alone,
The lovely voice of the unknown,
This is Romance chameleon-clad
That called me when I was a lad,
That calls me now to follow well
Through blighted Picardy to hell,
Through hell to some elusive bliss
Of new adventure after this:
To follow without asking why!
So you will know, if I must die
Upon this last and strangest quest,
It did not differ from the rest
In simple wonder dark and bright,
A halo for the blackest night:
And freedom like the unknown bird
Was a wild voice I had not heard,
Was a pure voice I fought to hear!
These words to you, my very dear,

Beyond the steel and the fire
Gleams the old desire.

THE NIGHTINGALES OF FLANDERS

"Le rossignol n'est pas mobilisé."
A French Soldier.

The nightingales of Flanders,
They have not gone to war.
A soldier heard them singing
Where they had sung before.

The earth was torn and quaking,
The sky about to fall.
The nightingales of Flanders,
They minded not at all.

At intervals he heard them
Between the guns, he said,
Making a thrilling music
Above the listening dead.

Of woodland and of orchard
And roadside tree bereft,
The nightingales of Flanders
Were singing, *France is left!*

TO FRANCIS LEDWIDGE

Killed in France—July 31, 1917

> Shall I meet Keats in some wild isle of balm
> Dreaming beside a tarn?
>
> FRANCIS LEDWIDGE.

Lover of the lane-rose, of rainy trees
And speech of corn and wind upon the hill,
Voice of the deep fields, high priest of the bees
When summer whispers all you say she will,
Beside what crystal water poised and still
Have you bewitched his dreams with news of these
And of his nightingale, talking until
The wild isle listens and the fairy seas?
But if as far as this dark rumor flies,
And he should ask of England and of France,
Craving the dear-bought wisdom of your eyes,
Oh, give him comfort! Tell him they still advance,
Those grim and glorious men who mean to free
Your Flanders grave, and his in Italy!

RHEIMS CATHEDRAL—1918

The cathedral's lyric stones
Spoke in faithful monotones.
Through their dust I heard them say
Beauty has not gone away.
Windows where the glass was gone
Put the sky's blue crystal on,
And the barest to my sight
Was a rose of colored light.
Where a saint had left his place
Memory filled the wounded space,
And the nave I knew so well
Trembled to a ghostly bell.
Forth I went to see once more
Joan of Arc before the door
Still unhurt and poised to ride.
Victory! I thought she cried.

VICTORY BELLS

I heard the bells across the trees,
I heard them ride the plunging breeze
Above the roofs from tower and spire,
And they were leaping like a fire,
And they were shining like a stream
With sun to make its music gleam.
Deep tones as though the thunder tolled,
Cool voices thin as tinkling gold,
They shook the spangled autumn down
From out the tree-tops of the town;
They left great furrows in the air
And made a clangor everywhere
As of metallic wings. They flew
Aloft in spirals to the blue
Tall tent of heaven and disappeared.
And others, swift as though they feared
The people might not heed their cry
Went shouting *Victory* up the sky.
They did not say that war is done,
Only that glory has begun
Like sunrise, and the coming day
Will burn the clouds of war away.
There will be time for dreams again,
And home-coming for weary men.

"HONORABLY DISCHARGED"

Will it be dusk when he comes home?
  The thick and starry fringe of night
That sweeps the garden shrubberies
  And turns the flowers white?

Or will a morning bring him back?
  A golden noon, an afternoon?
If I could set the sun ahead
  And fool the plodding moon!

POPPIES

When I grow old
And dull and cold,
I'll warm myself again,
Where poppy petals drift and fall
Like drops of scarlet rain,
Thinking of gallant soldier-men
With poppies for a pall:
When I forget their deeds, oh, then
Come Cold, and Dark, and all!

SEVEN INTERLUDES

FROST ON A WINDOW

This forest looks the way
Nightingales sound.
Tall larches lilt and sway
Above the glittering ground:
The wild white cherry spray
Scatters radiance round.

The chuckle of the nightingale
Is like this elfin wood.
Even as his gleaming trills assail
The spirit's solitude,
These leaves of light, these branches frail
Are music's very mood.

The song of these fantastic trees,
The plumes of frost they wear,
Are for the poet's whim who sees
Through a deceptive air,
And has an ear for melodies
When never a sound is there.

HILDA IN THE WOOD

Your talk was soft in the wood.
You spoke small soft words like moss
Or green velvet mullein leaves.
You showed me mulleins holding the first snow:
You brought me wintergreen . . . squaw-
berry . . .
A snail's coiled shell . . .

It was you who saw the wind
Perched like Puck
On a hillside boulder.
It was you who told me of his peacock feather
Made of air.

I remember hilltop birchtrees
Balancing marble clouds
On pale fingertips.
I remember your fingertips stained with earth,
With ground-pine . . . roots of fern . . .
Your hand was like a cold little stone
In a glove of lichen.

If there were to come a day without you,
If ever I look for you
And you are gone,
What shall I do with this memory
Soft-colored like your words,
Your wild small words of wind and mullein leaves
Furred with snow!

TO THE SCHOONER *CASCO* DEAR TO R. L. S.

(*Remodeled for the fishing-trade of the Pacific Coast*)

Has he forsaken heaven quite
  Where is no sail nor any sea,
And for the sake of lost delight
  Evaded immortality,
To feel the wind that sets you free,
  And tempt you to a wide blue flight
Where any trailing dawn may be
  Deep-fringed with breakers bursting white?

Then you will tread again the floor
  Uncharted you were wont to roam,
And flee in ecstasy before
  The squalls that fail to drive you home:
Will hear his laughter as of yore
  When the cloud breaks, the green waves comb,
And make his spirit glad once more
  With flagons of enchanted foam!

But when the ocean's azure swoon
  Glasses some isle of memories,
Steal thither softly to maroon
  Your wilful master if he please!
Slip in by night behind the trees
  Of its star-paven deep lagoon,
And drift across the Pleiades
  To anchor in the floating moon.

A LETTER TO ELSA

Rose-red, russet-brown,
Were there elves in your town?
When you breathed little words
Would they flock in like birds?
Did you eat magic fruit
For your supper to suit
The spiced garden, the dew,
And the sweetness of you?
Had the elf-mother spread
A low table with bread
And milk white as the moon?
Did you find very soon
A bed white as the milk,
Smooth and tender with silk,
Where you laid your tired head,
Russet-brown, rose-red?

Russet-eyes, rose-mouth,
When the wind's from the south,
When he rustles and stirs
In the plumed junipers,

Does he bring coaxing words
From the sly mocking-birds?
Do they call you to come
Where the wind is at home
When he rests from his trips?
Elf-locks, scarlet-lips,
I am wiser than they.
Hearken now what *I* say!

I will build you a house
Velvet-gray like a mouse,
Snug and shy among trees.
There shall be if you please
Peacocks pacing the walks,
And a fountain that talks,
And a playmate for you,
And a green cockatoo.
Bees shall dwell in the phlox
And the gay hollyhocks,
And their honey will be
In the sycamore tree.
Every dusk I will spread
A low table with bread
And a brown honey-comb
(When the bees have gone home),
And heaped mulberry-fruit,
(While the thrush tries his flute),

And milk white as the moon.
Then if bed-time come soon,
You shall lay your dear head
On a smooth silken bed
To the thrush-lullabies,
Russet-brown, rose-red,
Rose-mouth, russet-eyes!

THE CARIBBEAN FROM A NORTHERN GARDEN

Down a trail of blue larkspurs
Out of far memory
Flashed a day of strange islands
On their broad wings of sea,

Till, the garden forgotten,
I was out and away
In a boat's swinging crescent
On a wind-furrowed bay.

And delight shook my spirit
As the wind shakes a harp.
Oh, the rush of dark headlands
To the sea gleaming sharp

With a surf like a sword-edge!
Oh, the jewel-green hill
With its white coral village
Like a cloud standing still!

Though I tangle the sunset
In the dim northern trees,
Though I turn the pale foxglove
Into moon-colored cays

Where the larkspur-blue water
Casts a net of wild foam,
In this winter-doomed garden
How should I be at home?

I HAVE CARED FOR YOU, MOON

I have cared for you, Moon,
Cold as you are,
Frozen on the sky
With your dangling star.

It is not your shape,
Nor your lure of light,
Holding the sun
On your breast all night:

It is not your voice,
I have never heard
Your glittering cry,
Your wandering word.

Yet you are romance
And you are song.
I have cared for you, Moon,
Long, long,

Since I first paid toll
With a coin of dream
On the road you silver.
You peer and gleam

I Have Cared for You, Moon

With a wistful look
On your haunted face,
As though Earth were
A wonderful place.

DILEMMA

Dolores, I want to make a poem
About a river-valley full of apple-orchards in bloom,
Im wunderschönen Monat Mai!

They tell me I like to talk about Pan,
But I was planning this valley for Hermes out of heaven,
Or up from the south, maybe, and slightly tanned.
I should need words both cloudy and iridescent,
For landscape gardening on a large scale:
I should need plenty of elms and willows and poplars
And birds in the trees.
I think I should write figuratively of the birds,
A smoke of starlings,
A flame of scarlet tanagers,
Though there are not so many tanagers after all:
And I have a favorite phrase about the veery's vesper
bells,
Even if I did hear him yesterday at dawn,
Playing an Irish harp!
So startling is the beauty of this valley with its river,
And the orchards hovering above it like wings,

I should like to tell you about it in long lines like the curve
Of the river or the hills—

Blue air cloud-flecked as with the foam of May,
Green hills superbly hollowed to the sweep
Of the broad river's teeming deep delight
That feels slow summer coming up this way:
Gulls lately from the sea in swaying flight,
And flickers shrilling from the orchards steep,
The moveless plumes of elms in feathered sleep,
And pear-trees from the vale-crest rushing white,
Transparent poplars peering pale and bright
At new-leaf secrets willows cannot keep—

And so on, and so on.
But my river is mere words, and as for the valley
Somehow I fail to make my orchards stand on edge above blue water
Under the sunlight.
I miss the sheer pale suddenness of the apparition.
For me they will not leap along the hillsides
White and curved and smooth as the feathers on a seagull's neck.
And somebody else has said *slow summer,*
Or was it Spring?

Dolores,
How can I measure this wonder?
Why must I hang bells of rhyme upon the skirts of
beauty,
Or put my imagination through a sieve?
That imagination that at one moment lets me look at the
Hudson in its valley
As though it were peacocks pacing slowly toward the sea
Between hills of mother-of-pearl:
And at another, lets me tie the river into a bow-knot
To lay against the orchards
Like a jewel!

SONGS OF PLACES

(*Old Mexico*)

Gulf of Mexico

Now the steady ship runs south
  Over submerged stars:
Plows along the Milky Way,
  Swings across deep Mars,

Tossing foam of worlds aside,
  Treading glory down:
I have seen half heaven tonight
  Dip and dive and drown.

Guadalupe

No matter how you love me
  You cannot keep me home.
Along the airy lane of bells
  Beyond the peacock dome,

I know the way to travel
  And I shall go at will,
Where the stone sails await the wind
  Upon the holy hill.

The mariners who made them,
They have been long away;
But when a wind from heaven blows
They will come back some day,

And I shall hear them singing,
And watch the stone sails fill,
Till the white city like a ship
Moves out across the hill.

The Borda Gardens

The swans were like a flowing song
With crystal in the rhyme.
They sailed from line to limpid line
And beauty marked the time.

There was a rhythm in that song,
An accent no one knows,
And it has gone away again
Where all the music goes.

Orizaba

Is it long to Orizaba?
Have I far to go?
When I ask the carrier-pigeons
They don't know.

There's a mountain I am seeking,
Feathered all with snow.
When I ask the valley-orchids
They don't know.

Like an orchid pale and folded,
Like a snowy bird,
That's the mountain I am seeking,
Have you heard?

You can see it on the sunrise
When the clear winds blow.
Is it far to Orizaba,
Do you know?

Tampico

Oh, cut me reeds to blow upon
Or gather me a star,
But leave the sultry passion-flowers
Growing where they are.

I fear their somber yellow deeps,
Their whirling fringe of black,
And he who gives a passion-flower
Always asks it back.

Santa Teresa

A fern-shaped valley green,
Pale trees that drift their leaves,
The dew that drips unseen
From a rose's eaves:

So still the place, I know
The snail looks from his door.
I shall not see it so
Any more.

Popocatepetl

Dusk, and the far volcano wears
A film of sunset sky.
The valley glimmers like the sea
And little winds go by.

The jasmine flower upon my breast
Is an insistent word,
But patiently my stubborn heart
Pretends it has not heard.

Cuernavaca

You would not keep me near you,
You could not hold me far,
And now it does not matter
Where you are.

Cuernavaca

My heart has long forgotten
The ardent words you said,
But not the great stars blazing
Overhead!

Huasteca

Orchid, elfin orchid
Made of purple air,
Yours is wistful silence
Hard to bear.

Were he here, my lover,
Wiser far than I,
We should hear your beauty
Sing and sigh.

Vera Cruz

I see them in the storm-washed light
Like ebony against the sand,
The wrecks of ships lost long ago
From many a mellow land.

Oh, may the sand soon cover them
And all their sorrow be unlearned!
They are too like those dreams of mine
That nevermore returned.

Durango

The cactus candelabra
  Are lit with yellow flowers.
Come take my jocund mornings,
  My glancing April hours!

Do you not know the desert
  Is slow to bloom again?
The trail is long to April
  Across an arid plain,

And it is but a moment,
  The time of cactus flowers:
Before the dusty journey
  Oh, share my April hours!

Amecameca

I climb the sacred hillside
  Up through the evening blue.
The ancient steps are silvered
  By starlight and the dew.

And if the gray church vanish
  My soul may worship still,
For God has hung the Southern Cross
  Above the kneeling hill.

San Luis Potosí

Oh, for the comet's trail
  Across the purple sky,
So far we could not hear
  The glory rushing by!

It will not come again
  For more than ninety years,
When I shall have forgotten
  All my tears.

NOCTURNES

THE DOOR-HARP

You went. There drifted back to me
The last breath of a melody,
Diffused Æolian loveliness
Too fugitive to calm or bless.
I wonder human ear could know
A wraith of music fading so,
It left no footprints on the wind
Nor even memory behind.

Was it some solacing sweet air,
Or cadence of a soul's despair?
The small harp quivers on the door
That you have closed forevermore,
But will not breathe the lyric cry
I have forgotten; and its sigh
When others go, is only pain
Because you do not come again.

BELLS AT EVENING

I heard the bells turn over,
  Over and over until
They had poured their music:
  None was left to spill.

It was fresh and dusky
  When the big bells rang,
And I stopped to listen,
  Wondering why they sang,

Wondering and not caring,
  While the darkness fell,
And the west wind trembled
  Tossed from bell to bell.

NIGHT SONG

The road runs up against the stars,
Cool stars low-swinging in the night.
The valley-guarded river gleams,
The pear-trees glimmer white.

A little wind walks in content
Along the quiet star-filled wood.
This is the very road we went
And here is where we stood.

What unseen whisperers are these
Whose voices I have always known?
Only the happy heaven-heard trees,
For I am here alone.

A CHILD'S SONG OVERHEARD

I heard you singing, singing alone
Of river-sand and glittering stone,
Of a curved valley like a blade
And one who dwelt there unafraid.

Where was the river? Who the king
Whose deeds you were remembering?
Why did you make his glory high
And spangled like a stretch of sky?

Oh, this must be a land you knew
In dreams all lovely and untrue;
And of the king I heard you say
He lives a million years away

And holds the river in his hand
Between its ribbons of bright sand
Till suddenly he lets it fall
Down like a laughter musical!

PARTING

The round of a hill,
The glass of a pool,
Trees folded, still,
Trees dreamy, cool,

Trees with green wings,
The road going past
A house that clings
Where the moon rose last,

Where the moon rose late
The night you were gone,
And you would not wait
For her mellow dawn!

WHITE FOXGLOVE

Here in a leaning tower
Brown bees are at home.
This is the moon-loved flower.
Like cells of honey-comb
These taper and are brimmed
With savors of wild dew.
Oh, bees gold-laced and limbed,
I envy you!

THE RAINY MOON

Did you see the rainy moon
Up above the roofs last night?
It was like a primrose flower
When the mist is blowing white,

When a film of gossamer
Flutters from the evening tree,
And the primroses are pale
And the dusk has come to be.

I should like to go with you
Past the primrose-haunted mist
To that hill among the clouds
Where we trembled, where we kissed.

GARDEN DUSK

This stillness made of azure
And veiled with lavender
Must be my daylight garden
Where all the pigeons were!

Blue dusk upon my eyelids,
Your drifting moods disclose
The moth that is a flower,
The wings that are a rose.

Make haste, exhale your sweetness,
For you must vanish soon:
The garden will forget you
At rising of the moon.

A glory dawns predestined
Of old to banish you
And bind you fast with rainbows
In dungeons of the dew.

And who will then remember
Your cool and gossamer art?
Ah, never moon may exile
Your beauty from my heart!

THE ROSE

The little rose is dust, my dear,
The elfin wind is gone
That sang a song of silver words
And cooled our hearts with dawn.

And what is left to hope, my dear,
Or what is left to say?
The rose, the little wind and you
Have gone so far away.

CEDARS

(For a Color-Etching by George Senseney)

They are so dark, the cedars,
They keep so still a house!
Muffled in purple silence
They fold their brooding boughs.

Yet they are shaped like music
When the heart listens most!
They are the wind's grave gesture,
The singing river's ghost,

And twilight in their branches
Is murmurous and cool,
Like strings of water falling
Into a waiting pool.

MOONRISE

(*For a Color-Etching by George Senseney*)

Along the dunes the wind leans low
Where amethystine shadows flow
Softly among gigantic trees
Like tides of sleep about their knees.

Intense and strange the moon sweeps by
Alone across the hollow sky.
No cloud, no star, no gray-winged bird,
Only her breathing sail unheard!

Cleanly her white bow cuts the dark.
She cleaves the night with never a spark
Of fiery spray from sun or star.
I wonder who the sailors are?

SOLITUDE

(For a Color-Etching by George Senseney)

Color. The wing of a cloud.
Stillness. The wind at rest
That cried all day aloud.
The wood unmoving stands
Against the topaz west.
Oh, straining wind-torn trees,
Are you at last quite still
With the dusk in your hands?
What is it you descry
By august lantern-light
Of planets, where the sky
Touches the hill?

Souls. Souls that go by
Tireless. Going home.
Gray wind-glimmering things
Through the moon-empty night,
Gleaming wings,
Foam
Of spirits, white, white!

Past the folded fire
Of the sunset flying,
Always a mist that blows,
A silvery shape that goes,
A vanishing, a crying. . . .

"NUIT D'ÉTOILES": CLAUDE DEBUSSY

(*Sung to an accompaniment of harps*)

TO E. D.

Oh she was in a golden gown
With harps about her like tall wings:
They must have fluttered from that town
Made all of gold and precious things:
And golden too above the strings
Her gleaming voice bewitched the ear
Like the night-wandering bird that sings
An air wild Eden used to hear!

"REFLETS DANS L'EAU": CLAUDE DEBUSSY

(*Harp ensemble*)

TO K. F.

That remote music, that delight
Of breathing harps from far away,
Awoke my thought as spirits might
If I could hear the things they say.

I think they made the cobweb chord
Debussy hangs with trembling dew,
And planned that octave like a sword
That cuts the gossamer strands in two.

They lean above his pool of pearl,
Its lucent shade, its shimmerings
Of light like little waves that curl
And break across the startled strings

Till the reflecting water shows
Not sky alone and willows' grace,
But color of an unborn rose,
And wonder on an unseen face.

ELEGY FOR THE IRISH POET FRANCIS LEDWIDGE

(*Killed in action—July 31, 1917*)

Never more singing
Will you go now,
Wearing wild moonlight
On your brow.
The moon's white mood
In your silver mind
Is all forgotten.
Words of wind
From off the hedgerow
After rain,
You do not hear them;
They are vain.
There is a linnet
Craves a song,
And you returning
Before long.
Now who will tell her,
Who can say
On what great errand
You are away?

You whose kindred
Were hills of Meath,
Who sang the lane-rose
From her sheath,
What voice will cry them
The grief at dawn
Or say to the blackbird
You are gone?

THE WILDERNESS

I found myself alone . . . and then
No man differed from other men
And they were like a mood gone by.
The planets quivered on the sky

And poured themselves in silver streams,
The wilderness was blurred with dreams
And starlight and the ghost of blue.
Trees, with their great wings lifted through

The mist, were stirring where it thinned.
The young moon floated up the wind,
And from the warm and hidden ground
I heard the multitudinous sound

Of life I felt and used to know
A thousand thousand years ago,
And mean to know again some day
A thousand thousand years away.

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